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freedom
COUNTRY GENTLEMAN'S

REASONS

FOR VOTING AGAINST

MR. WILBERFORCE'S MOTION

FOR

**A BILL TO PROHIBIT THE IMPORTATION
OF AFRICAN NEGROES INTO THE CO-
LONIES.**

L O N D O N :

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A
COUNTRY GENTLEMAN'S
REASONS,

&c. &c.

POSSESSING neither great oratorical talents, or the confidence necessary for displaying such as I have to advantage in a public assembly, I generally content myself with listening to the arguments of others, without attempting to obtrude my own into the debate; and as I am as little ambitious to see my own performances in print, as to hear the sound of my own voice in the House of Commons, when I have given my vote agreeable to the conviction of my own mind,

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I trust

I trust to the intrinsic propriety of the measure for my justification with my constituents. That I now depart from this line of conduct, and submit to the public consideration, the reasons which induced me to give my negative to the resolution propounded by Mr. Wilberforce, for prohibiting the importation of African negroes into the British colonies, is owing to the general prejudice which, I find, is entertained against the African trade, and the heavy charges of injustice, cruelty, robbery, and even murder itself, which are so emphatically imputed to all those whose *unfeeling hearts or impenetrable heads* are said to have led them to oppose that philanthropic resolution.

The principles upon which Mr. Wilberforce's original motion, in 1788, was founded, were, as I well remember, the inconsistency of a state of slavery with
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the natural rights of man, the dictates of natural religion, and the precepts of Christianity ; all of which, with one voice, declared men to be born equal, and held in abhorrence the idea of personal subordination. These principles were, however, *deserted* at the very outset of the late debate, when it was declared, that the negroes now in the colonies were not meant to be emancipated, that nothing more was intended than the preventing the natives of Africa from being brought there. The people of Africa were, therefore, alone the objects of all the philanthropy of the measure ; and in excuse for this desertion of the Creoles, it was said that men, brought up in a state of slavery, were incapable of freedom, and the apposite simile of the eye, long accustomed to darkness, suffering by the sudden admission of light, was brought to illustrate the position, that the Creole

negroes, or those which are born in the colonies, are less fitted for the enjoyment of freedom than the natives of Africa. This ingenious apology for abandoning the general philanthropic principles which were set out with, has an excellence in its composition which was not developed in the debate, an excellence which does not generally belong to the arguments of great orators ; for it will serve better next year than it does this, and it will gather strength like a snow-ball by the lapse of time ; for if the Creole children of the Africans are less capable of freedom than their parents, *their* children of course will be still more incapable of it ; and as they will degenerate with every generation, they will of course become less and less worthy of emancipation. But hopeless and abandoned as is the case of the Creole negroes, and unworthy as they must continue

tinue to be of the attention of our philanthropists, how comes it to pass that they have likewise abandoned the very objects which first excited their humanity. The very sufferers whose cause they undertook—the wretched victims of this execrable commerce—the *natives of Africa now in our colonies*—for it was these, or the survivors of them, who have been kidnapped, and torn from their families and their country; it was these who have passed through all the horrors of the middle passage; it was these who, it is said, are now lamenting, in bonds and misery in our islands, the loss of all their tender connections in their own country—their dignity of rank and station—the consolations of friendship—the sweet effusions of enlightened minds—the exalted sentiments of freedom and virtue—that *otium cum dignitate*, the reward of splendid public services,

vices, such as the great General *, who, we were told, had been dreaming of upon his passage. No excuse was made for this abandonment but that, by prohibiting the farther importation of others into the Colonies, the condition of those already there would be mended, as the planter, finding he could have no fresh supply, would be more careful of those he had, and more attentive to their progeny, as he could have no other resource to increase his stock. This mode of reasoning, so specious in speculation, we all know from experience, to be unfounded in fact; for whenever labourers are *scarce* in any part of this country, it is the general practice of farmers to exact *more work* from their *hired* servants than when labourers are readily procured; and we also know that apprentices are

* See Mr. Smith's speech.

much more severely treated by masters who cannot afford to hire journeymen, than by those who can and do hire them ; and all complaints of cruelty and ill usage to apprentices are *found to be against* masters in indigent circumstances, and consequently such who are most in want of the labour of their apprentices ; for the truth is, men in all countries act more from the impulse of present necessity, than the sober deductions of reason : and from the accounts collected from those who have had the best opportunities of knowing what passes in the West Indies, it appears that the opulent planters treat their negroes with more humanity and indulgence than the inferior and distressed shew to theirs ; and as the new adventurers and the small planters, who have more lands than their present hands can cultivate, are those who most want a supply of new negroes, the debarring them

them of that supply would be the occasion of *their* working those they have more severely, and the same cause, viz. the paucity of hands, which would drive them to do so, would *a fortiori* prevent them sparing the labour of those they have to attend to the rearing young ones, Nor has the importation of negroes from Africa prevented the increase of Creole negroes ; for it was fully proved by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his very able and accurate calculation of the decrease of the proportion between the births and deaths in Jamaica in the last twenty years, that it gradually diminished as the stock of Africans augmented, which within the twenty years, he shewed had been increased from 110,000 to 245,000 ; and upon that *data* he founded his argument, that the present stock of negroes in that island would be kept up by the natural increase, the births being equal

equal to the deaths ; and from thence concluded that no farther importation was necessary. I fully acquiesced in his premises, and in the inferences he drew from them ; and had he shewn that the islands of Jamaica, Dominica, St. Vincent, and Grenada, are fully cultivated, or that the farther increase of the West-India products would not be beneficial to the empire, I should have given my vote for the prohibition on those grounds ; but that not having been done, as, indeed, it was impossible to do it, I was led to consider the vast increase in the importation these last twenty years, as a proof that they were beneficially employed, while the Creole births increased also ; so that the proposed prohibition of farther importations could not be shewn to serve or benefit in any way the negroes already in the colonies ; but, on the contrary, would be as injurious to them,

as it would be disadvantageous to the nation at large, and to the individuals interested in the colonies or in the trade with them. The supposition so confidently relied on, that the planters preferred the purchase of new negroes to the rearing Creoles, as *cheaper*, was unsupported by any facts, but, on the contrary, was, in my apprehension, fully confuted by the *very evidence* produced in support of the prohibition; for, besides the proof which I have already adverted to as stated by Mr. Pitt (which goes directly to the denial of the charge) inasmuch as at the same time they have shewn that the planters in Jamaica have been increasing their stock by the importation of more than double the number they were possessed of twenty years ago, and that the Creole born have increased in a greater proportion than they had before done, when the numbers

imported

imported were so much less; and by asserting that every Creole-born negro is worth two natives of Africa of the same age, and that one half of the Africans die after they are purchased, without doing the planter any service, they made it out to be *now* the interest of the planters in a very high degree indeed to rear Creoles rather than to purchase Africans; for it is well known that the price of an African negroe has been, upon an average of some years past, about 40l. sterling; and if one half of those that are purchased die in the seasoning, every effective African negroe stands the planter in 80l; and as every Creole born is allowed to be worth two Africans, each of *them* must, by this statement, be worth to the planter 160l. With what shadow of justice then can it be charged upon the planter that he prefers the purchase of African negroes to the rearing of Creoles as the *cheapest*

mode of increasing his stock? No proof, however, as I observed, was attempted to be given of the planter's aversion to the rearing Creoles; but it was said by way of implication, that if the farmers in certain counties in England did not breed horses, it might naturally be concluded that they found it more for their interest to purchase them from other countries. But surely that case does not apply to the West-India planter and his negroes? for in order to breed horses, studs of brood mares must be kept for the purpose—But is it to be expected that the planters should keep seraglios of female negroes in order to raise young Creoles? The farmers in those countries where breeding would be inconvenient, we know, sometimes ring or spay their female cattle and hogs to prevent their breeding; but among all the calumnies so illiberally thrown upon the West-India

India planters, no such practices have been imputed to them respecting their female negroes; on the contrary, they have been charged with allowing them too free an intercourse with the men. Upon the whole, then, I think I am perfectly well authorized to repeat the assertion I set out with, that the principles upon which the original motion was founded *were abandoned*, by confining the resolution to the prevention of the farther importation of African negroes into the Colonies; and as I judged that to be the case, I felt myself at liberty to take up the consideration of the proposition as a *public measure*, in which the general interests of the nation, as well as those of many individuals, together with the sacred rules of justice and humanity to a foreign people, were involved; and I shall now proceed to the examination of the arguments which
were

were adduced in support of the resolution, as they respect the natives of Africa, who were the subject of it. But here again the principles of philanthropy, which were the avowed motives of the original motion, appeared to me to be as much abandoned, in respect to the negroes in Africa, as I flatter myself I have shewn they were in respect to the negroes in our Colonies. For the resolution did not propose to prohibit British subjects from purchasing negroes on the coast of Africa, or British ships from taking them on board, but to *prevent their being carried to the British Colonies*; so that if the French or Spaniards desired us to procure negroes for them, we were to be left at full liberty to do so, and to practise all the arts of kidnapping, and to exercise all the cruelties and barbarities we were told have been practised in procuring slaves, and also to
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continue the horrors of transporting them in our ships, and the waste and destruction of our seamen that manned them, and (provided *our own Colonies were not cultivated, or their products increased by their labour,*) we might with impunity lend our consciences to other nations to assist them in the improvement of their Colonies. And as it was confessed that no foreign state entertained the idea of prohibiting the importation of negroes into *their Colonies*, but that some of them, on the contrary, encouraged it by the grant of bounties, it was highly probable that our people and ships would have been so employed; and as there is abundant space in the French and Spanish Colonies to extend their cultivation of West-India products to the supply of the consumption of the whole world, *their demand for negroes* would probably have been increased in
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the same degree as ours was diminished ; and the same number of Africans would continue to be kidnapped and transported across the Atlantic as hitherto, while our only consolation for having thus promoted the trade, and increased the shipping of other nations at the expence of our own, would be the consciousness of our deriving no public benefit by the *iniquitous business* we assisted other nations in carrying on. That consideration, however, I own, did not overbalance, in my mind, the mischief to be apprehended from the increase of the trade and navigation of other nations, and the diminution of our own, and especially as a considerable abatement was to be made from the philanthropy of the resolution, on account of the want of those regulations which it is in the power of the British government to make, as well respecting the mode of procuring the
negroes

negroes as in their transportation, while the trade continues in our hands, but which could neither be made nor enforced were we to carry it on for others. I therefore concluded that, on all accounts, it would be better to *regulate* than to *prohibit* the procuring negroes for our colonies. Whether the African princes, states, or individuals, can acquire such a property in their fellow creatures as to give them a right to sell them into perpetual servitude, is a question I leave for the discussion of Civilians and Divines. The practice of mankind from the earliest ages of the world, is certainly in favour of the supposition that they can; and the heads of the church of England have either directly admitted it, or tacitly allowed it; in several instances, as well in as out of Parliament *; and it being well known that the Africans sold one

* See Mr. Knox's Letter to Mr. Wilberforce, with the papers annexed to it.

another long before we traded to that country, and that *they* do now sell one another to other European traders, being also an established fact, I conceive the question, with respect to the trade itself, is reduced to this single consideration, viz. is it, or is it not, proper for the people of Great Britain to take a share in a trade carried on by other nations from the earliest ages of the world, and which other nations do and will continue to carry on, whether we partake in it or not? The principle upon which I decided this question, in my own breast, was this: That it is in our power to render the condition of the African negro much more comfortable by purchasing and transporting him to our colonies, than it now is, or than it is in our power to render it in Africa. Enough is known of the condition of the negroes in Africa to satisfy the most scrupulous that they are there

there considered and treated as the absolute property of their princes or great men; that they are without instruction of any kind; that they possess, in general, scarce any characteristic, except their outward shape and speech, which distinguishes men from the inferior animals. To remove them, therefore, to an enlightened country, and in recompence for their moderate labour to teach them to know and worship the supreme Being, and to open to them the sacred depositories of his will, and of the glorious rewards he has promised to confer on those who do it, is surely to benefit them. And, therefore, as I could not deem the principle of the trade repugnant to the laws of humanity or religion, I freely consented to its continuance, in the hope and confidence, however, that such regulations would be made as should have the effect, in a good degree, to correct

the abuses complained of; and I was the more confirmed in this opinion and hope by the instances of abuse which were stated to have happened, as well upon the coast of Africa, as in the middle passage, and in our Colonies; the two latter of which it is evidently in our own power to correct; and, indeed, much has been done already towards it; and if our power does not extend, as it certainly does not, to regulate the mode of procuring slaves throughout the interior of Africa, it is still less competent to put an entire stop to it. The abuses, however, on the coast of Africa, which have been so much amplified, are such as it is in the power of Parliament to correct in a good degree; and it was both cruel and unjust to impute such abuses to the merchants and planters as they *had not*, and Parliament *had* the power to prevent or punish. The cognizance of all crimes

crimes committed upon the high seas certainly belongs to our criminal Court of Admiralty ; and it was the fault of Administration that the Captain, whose murder of an infant on board his ship was so pathetically described, was not punished as a felon ; nor is it yet too late to bring him to justice, if he be living ; and if the kidnapping of Africans be not an offence cognizable by any of our laws now in being, it surely may be made so, and the offenders punished upon their return to England. The correction of the abuses complained of in our Colonies belongs to their several Legislatures, some of whom have already gone a great way towards it ; and there is no doubt but that, upon proper recommendation, the others will do the same ; and that which I conceive to be the proper object of our philanthropy, the *bettering the condition of the African*

can negroes and their progeny, as well in respect to temporals as spirituals, by their removal to our Colonies, will be obtained ; whereas I have shewn, that the resolution proposed would have answered no benevolent or beneficial purpose whatever ; and therefore I trust that myself, and all those who joined with me in giving it a negative, will, upon a candid consideration of the reasons I have adduced, stand acquitted of the heavy charges which have been laid against us ; and if those prejudices are dispelled, I may flatter myself with obtaining a fair hearing to such reasons of policy as had a secondary influence upon my conduct that night. The first of those which I shall mention is, the danger of alienating the affections of our subjects in the Colonies by the harsh means which must have been employed to carry an act for the purpose into execution.

cution. I know, indeed, it was on a former day properly and manfully said, that means were not wanting to Government to enforce obedience to its laws in all parts of the British dominions ; but I am old enough to remember to have heard it also said in the same place, not many years since, that if the North-American Colonies should make a nail or a horseshoe, their ports should be filled with ships, and their towns with troops ; and yet I have lived to see all those Colonies not only make nails and horseshoes, but military weapons also, and point them at the breasts of the King and Parliament of Great Britain with success. The prohibitory act, to be effectual, must have made all British and Irish, and British-colony ships, liable to seizure, if found with negroes on board in any port of the British Colonies. Now the laws of the Colonies vest the property
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of negroes in their owners ; and those laws extend their operation to the utmost limits of the several colonies ; and I well know, (and if Ministers do not know it, their governors are highly culpable for not informing them of it,) that every Colony deems its own legislature *the only authority* that can make laws within the limits of their respective jurisdictions ; and were an act of Parliament to enact any thing contrary to a law of the Colony, it would be deemed of no force within that colony. The act, therefore, which should direct a custom-house officer to seize any British ship, having negroes on board belonging to persons residing in such Colony, would be opposed and resisted, and as every Colony would make a common cause of it ; all the troops and ships of Great Britain would be found wanting to compel submission, which at last could not be effected,

fected, even if no other power inter-
 fered, without the destruction of the
 Colonies. Another embarrassing, though
 less dangerous circumstance, would have
 arisen out of the liberty which it was
 admitted, ought in justice to be allowed
 to the purchasers of lands in the Ceded
 Islands, to provide themselves with ne-
 groes, to enable them to comply with
 the conditions of cultivation and im-
 provement, they were bound to perform
 in a limited time, under pain of forfei-
 ture of the lands they had purchased :
 for so long as this indulgence continued,
 it would be very much the fault of
 the masters of ships, with negroes on
 board, if they subjected their cargoes
 to seizure upon the high seas to the
 windward of any of those islands, as
 they would only have to declare that
 they were bound for the one to leeward
 of them. And fresh difficulties would

have arisen in framing clauses for preventing their re-exportation to the other Colonies, after being landed in any of those islands, or their importation from thence into any of the other Colonies. But besides, as in order to render the prohibition effectual, provision must have been made in the act to prevent the purchase of negroes at any of the British settlements on the coasts of Africa, and also to prohibit the exportation thither of any of those articles which are used in the purchase of them, another fleet and army must have been sent to the coast of Africa; and at the same time it would probably have been found necessary to increase the military establishment at home to *keep things quiet* HERE. Such were the impending evils which, it appears, the majority on the 15th instant preserved the nation from by their rejection of Mr. Wilberforce's motion. I am, however,

far

far from imputing to the eloquent leaders, in this unadvised business, any intention of involving this country in such calamities ; for I really believe they were not foreseen by them, as great prescience is seldom found attached to the most splendid talents ; nor, perhaps, would any of these mischiefs have actually befallen the country, even if a bill, founded upon the resolution, had passed the House of Commons, as I am persuaded the great and distinguished characters in the Upper House, to whom the nation looks up with confidence of protection, would not have suffered their country to be involved in such calamities by a most wanton and unprovoked attack upon the unoffending, peaceable Colonies, and at a time too when the nation was smarting under the wounds which it had received in an unsuccessful contest with its former Colonies. But then, in
that

that case, an evil I deprecate almost as much as any of the others, (a rupture of the present Administration,) might have followed the rejection of the bill in the Lords. Every well-wisher, therefore, to the peace and prosperity of the empire, and to the continuance of the present Administration, must applaud the vote I gave; and I trust there is wisdom enough in the country to prevent the necessity of my repeating it at any future period.

THE END.